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ADVANCING A LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL NETWORK IN MICHIGAN: AN ASSESSMENT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Findings in this assessment have been drawn from responses obtained during phone interviews conducted with Michigan local food council leaders and council member feedback collected during network formation meetings on July 30, 2014 and Oct. 27, 2014, to gauge the potential for creating a statewide network of local food councils.

Interviews revealed many commonalities among councils, including how recently most have been formed, their typical volunteer base and passion-driven composition, and struggles with identity, community engagement and policy work. Despite such challenges, interviews also revealed the range of local policy work councils are engaged in, including urban agriculture ordinances, school wellness policies, cooperation between food resource providers, citizen education and county procurement.

The interviews and meetings hosted in 2014 corroborated earlier work conducted by the Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC) and revealed sufficient need and interest to move forward with developing a statewide local food council network. A statewide network of local food councils will provide a space for these councils to talk with one another, share ideas and resources and collaborate on policy change or funding applications. Additionally, a statewide network

can connect local councils to statewide policy information, issues and actions. The network can provide technical assistance, organize and lead training opportunities on a variety of issues affecting local councils, such as capacity building, funding challenges, conducting policy work, council development and racial equity in the food system. Finally, the statewide network can connect local food policy councils to state and federal policy work that impacts the local food system.

While nearly all councils interviewed have used the Michigan Good Food Charter in their work in some way, some have done so more extensively than others. A statewide network could help local food councils better understand how to leverage the Charter in their communities, as well as help lift up the collective voice of local councils in support of Charter goals.

➤ INTRODUCTION

This report examines local food councils in the state of Michigan and the potential for developing a statewide network of local food policy councils and similar groups. The phrase “local food council” is used throughout this report to refer to groups convening around a defined sub-state geographical area to assess and recommend practices or policies that impact one or more aspects of the food system.

The recommendations in this report are made with the presumption that the Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) will take the lead on hiring a consultant responsible for developing the statewide network in 2015. Funding for a network coordinator may, at the discretion of CRFS staff, be renewed annually through 2017 depending on measureable progress and interest.

This report is based on in-depth analysis of prior local food council network work, interviews with local food council leaders and feedback received from participants in two preliminary local food council network meetings. The primary purpose of this study was to better understand current context and areas of work among Michigan’s local food councils, confirm that demand was present for such a network and identify functions of a local food council network. This report will also demonstrate ways a local food council network and participating councils can help move the goals of the Michigan Good Food Charter forward without duplicating the efforts of other local food networks, such as the Michigan Farm to Institution Network and Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network.

➤ LOCAL FOOD COUNCILS IN MICHIGAN

CONTEXTS, CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES

Forming food policy councils is relatively new across the state. While there are a few councils that formed in the early 2000’s, most councils have formed over the past three years. This is due in part to the leadership of the Michigan Department of Community Health, which offered grant money to local county health departments to create local food policy councils as a component of their Building Healthy Communities funding. Additionally, Michigan State University Extension (MSUE), through their Community Food Systems workgroup, has provided guidance to form local food policy councils across the state. At the same time, the interest in food at the local level has exploded and community members passionate about their local food system have come together.

Regardless of how a local food council started, interviews with local council representatives revealed numerous commonalities.

Common Themes

- The formation of local food councils in Michigan is relatively new. Most councils have formed since 2011.
- Local food councils have come about in a variety of ways. . Councils have formed from community members coming together to talk about food, through county health department initiatives and through MSUE leadership.
- The majority of councils surveyed are volunteer-based. Of the 14 councils interviewed, just three had paid staff members at the time of the interview. Only one council had a full-time staff member.
- Council members and leaders are passionate about their work. Their passion is what keeps them engaged in the council. They see the potential for how a vibrant local food system can positively impact their community.

- Councils struggle with keeping community members engaged. Community members are most likely to engage when a council is active and its impact is visible. At times when council work may be slow or focused more on the nuts and bolts of running an organization, such as developing an organization's structure, strategic planning or creating by-laws, community engagement often dwindles.
- Councils struggle with identity. Some councils are struggling to find their place in the local food system of their community, while others are struggling to understand who their work influences and how to be influential.
- There is a lot of concern surrounding the word "policy". Many councils are unclear how to conduct policy work within the confines of either their employment or funding source restrictions. Additionally, there is confusion as to what constitutes policy and how to engage in policy work.
- Nearly all councils interviewed have used the Michigan Good Food Charter to influence their work.



CURRENT AREAS OF WORK

Despite concerns and uncertainties with policy work, numerous councils are advocating for and leading policy change at a number of different levels across the state. The following examples show the types of policy work occurring at the local level.

Detroit Food Policy Council¹

Since its formation in 2009, one of the things setting the Detroit Food Policy Council apart from other food system work in the city is their focus on policy. The council has four policy workgroups: Healthy Food Access, Agriculture Advocates, Community Food Justice, and Schools and Institutions. Council efforts were integral in passing an urban agriculture ordinance in the city in 2012-2013. The council is now looking at how the city handles land sales as there is not currently a process in place for purchasing land for agricultural use. The Healthy Food Access and Community Food Justice workgroups have been working on a community mapping project identifying all the food resources in the city. The council also wants to help grocers understand what their community needs with regards to healthy food. Finally, the Detroit Food and Fitness Collaborative has recently completed an Economic Analysis of Detroit's Food System² to help shape policy and inform policy makers in the coming years. Members of the Detroit Food Policy Council were part of the steering committee that commissioned the report and will be addressing some of the report recommendations.

Sault Tribe: Tribal Food Sovereignty Collaborative³

The Sault Tribe serves seven of 15 counties in the Upper Peninsula and is a member of the U.P. Food Exchange (UPFE). In addition to being a UPFE member, the Sault Tribe has developed its own Tribal Food Sovereignty Collaborative to address tribe needs. By bringing people together, they were able to assess recurring areas of interest and identified five focus areas for their work. Through their Healthy Vending Project, they provided school districts with sample policy language upon written request. Using the sample policy language provided, school districts

¹ Detroit Food Policy Council:

<http://detroitfoodpolicycouncil.net/>

² Economic Analysis of Detroit's Food System:

http://www.gcfb.org/site/DocServer/DETROIT_book_6_8_29_14_lowres.pdf?docID=9962

³ Sault Tribe: Tribal Food Sovereignty Council:

<http://up4health.org/>

voluntarily made policy changes. The Marquette School District reviewed their school wellness policy, Munising Public Schools rewrote their Healthy Eating policies, and Tahquamenon Area Schools rewrote their school food policies. Additionally, the school districts rewrote their policies to include access to water for students.

Ottawa County Food Policy Council⁴

The Ottawa Food Policy Council has developed and is actively working on six priority areas in their strategic plan, a number of which focus on food access. Area pantries are beginning to change their policies and increase the amount of healthy foods offered to their consumers.

A policy change was implemented to improve the level of cooperation between food resource providers. A Holland Food Depot now exists at the Macatawa Resource Center so that each pantry doesn't need to have someone make a lengthy drive several times a month to the Feeding America site in Comstock Park. Additionally, a Feeding America truck delivers food orders to the Holland Food Depot once a month. Pantries pick up their orders at the Holland Food Depot, a process that helps both time and money. There are currently 10 to 11 agencies using the facility. The Greater Ottawa County United Way pays for transportation.

Another council priority was expanding access to farmers markets and community gardens for low income families. Council members worked to change policy at the Holland Farmers Market, and now vendors who accept Bridge Cards must return five percent of their total Bridge Card sales back to the market. This funding helps pay for staffing to operate the market's Bridge Card program.

U.P. Food Exchange⁵

The U.P. Food Exchange connects local food activities occurring across the Upper Peninsula. The Exchange consists of three regions – Eastern, Central and Western – and each operates its own steering committees and subcommittees. The subcommittees vary in each region and are based on the needs of that region. Over the past year, the UPFE Policy Committee created two educational documents, one for local decision makers and one for citizens, to help them better understand the local food system and policies relating to food and agriculture. This document is being used across the Upper Peninsula and around the state.

Washtenaw County Food Policy Council⁶

The Washtenaw Food Policy Council has developed a policy priority agenda from which 23 policy priorities were identified. The council has four policy action teams and each one is responsible for doing the ground work associated with its respective policy priorities. Over the past year, the council has worked to develop local purchasing language that will impact both food service packaging and local food procurement. The Environmentally Preferred Purchasing policy will amend the Washtenaw County procurement policy used by county employees to mandate that foodservice wares and packaging be reusable, compostable or recyclable. The Local Vendor Preference Purchasing Policy will change the language of the county procurement policy to give preference for locally grown, processed and prepared foods. Both policies, along with the food policy council's policy priority agenda, were approved at the Ways and Means Committee meeting on Nov. 5, 2014, and subsequently approved at the Board of Commissioners meeting on Nov. 19, 2014.

⁴ Ottawa County Food Policy Council:
<http://www.ottawafood.org/>

⁵ U.P. Food Exchange: <http://upfoodexchange.com/>
⁶ Washtenaw Food Policy Council:
<https://washtenawfoodpolicycouncil.wordpress.com/>

➤ POTENTIAL FOR STATEWIDE NETWORK

HISTORY

In 2012, the Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC) created five task forces to look at different food system issues, including a Local Food Policy Council Network Task Force to identify and understand the work of the growing number of local food policy councils in Michigan. Participation in monthly phone meetings was strong at first, but declined over time.

In spring 2012, a survey was conducted by Sowmya Surapur, MFPC intern, to assess the councils and the potential for collaboration in the state. At the time of her report, *Michigan Food Policy Council Network – A survey of local food policy councils and collaboration potential in Michigan*, the MFPC database had identified 27 local community groups with connections to food issues. Of the 27 groups identified, 18 participated in an interview for the report. The report indicated there was an opportunity for local food councils to learn from one another and suggested that this could be achieved by developing a supportive network at the state level along with facilitating teleconferences, listserves or food policy council network meetings. While the MFPC was disbanded at the end of 2013 and replaced by an inter-agency Food Policy Subcommittee in 2014, the MFPC report made the initial case and laid the foundation for creating a statewide network.

In spring 2014, the Center for Regional Food Systems at Michigan State University (MSU) commissioned an assessment of the potential for a statewide local food council network. During summer 2014, 17 councils were contacted⁷ and asked to participate in a one-hour phone interview. Of those contacted, 14 councils participated. Based on these interviews and the earlier

MFPC report, it was determined that sufficient interest existed to move forward with developing a statewide local food council network. A preliminary planning meeting for a local food council network was held on July 30, 2014, in Lansing, Mich. Representatives from 13 local councils participated in the half-day meeting, which combined a learning opportunity with discussion on what a statewide network would look like. A desire for continuing to develop a statewide network was expressed at the meeting in July and a subsequent meeting took place on Oct. 27, 2014, in Lansing in conjunction with the 2014 Michigan Good Food Summit. This meeting also paired a learning opportunity for local food councils and discussion for next steps in developing a statewide network.

Both of these preliminary meetings, as well as the interviews conducted with key local food council leaders, revealed strong interest in developing and participating in a statewide local food council network. Through grant resources, CRFS has the ability to facilitate developing this network by supporting an individual or organization who can play a coordinating role. CRFS staff members can also support this effort by contributing their knowledge and experience in developing statewide networks, most recently the Michigan Farm to Institution Network and Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network.



⁷ The Michigan Food Policy Council surveyed a broad list of community groups including hunger networks and community development corporations. The Center for Regional Food Systems only contacted representatives from groups that fit the definition of a local food council.

STATEWIDE NETWORK FUNCTIONS

All of the local council leaders interviewed indicated an interest in participating in a statewide local food council network. Local council leaders recognize that the challenges they face in the local food system in their community are not necessarily unique. They acknowledge that challenges their group faces, ranging from how to organize to understanding policy work to engaging community members and local leaders, are likely being faced in other communities across the state and they are eager to share and learn from one another.

A common fear voiced by several council leaders was determining how to keep participants engaged in the statewide network and not lose interest, a situation that happened with the Local Food Policy Council Network Task Force created by the Michigan Food Policy Council two years earlier. While the MFPC task forces were intended to make recommendations to state government rather than implement changes, the lack of clarity and communication about this intention resulted in widely varying expectations of how the work would move forward and, ultimately, a decline in task force participation.

One way to ensure that a breakdown of a statewide network doesn't occur is to create an environment where participants have shared interests and expectations, can build and nurture relationships and learn from one another, and are held accountable to one another. By creating a peer-to-peer learning environment, local councils become invested in the network. They are not dependent on an "expert" telling them what they should and should not do. Instead they are the "experts" who share information about topics in which they have knowledge and experience and begin to depend on one another from within the statewide network for guidance and support. Nicole Chardoul, Chair of the Washtenaw County Food Policy Council, suggested local councils could work with the statewide network coordinator to develop and present content for network meetings. This was tested in both the July 30 and Oct. 27, 2014, meetings and met with a positive response.

Another way to avoid burnout and participation drop-off is to structure meetings (in-person and virtual) and communications in a way that is both meaningful and useful to the participants. Developing criteria to determine when and how information should be shared within the network will help minimize the amount of overwhelming and unnecessary communication that is subsequently disregarded.

Interviews and meetings with council members identified the following six key functions for a statewide network:

- providing a space for local councils to network with one another;
- connecting local councils to statewide policy information, issues and actions;
- helping local councils build capacity;
- providing hands-on training to local food councils;
- connecting local policy information, issues and actions to other parts of the state; and
- connecting local councils to national policy information, issues and actions.

Providing a space for local councils to network with one another

When asked "how would you like to connect with a statewide group?" council leaders indicated that networking with other food councils would be the greatest benefit of participating in a statewide network. By forming a statewide local food council network, there is the opportunity to create a place where local food council leaders can have open-ended networking opportunities to talk to one another and share resources and ideas. Open networking time can allow councils working on similar issues to learn from each other, as well as to create opportunities for gaining insights from other councils before taking on new issues. Both preliminary planning meetings included open networking time, and in the meeting evaluation, a number of attendees felt this was the most valuable part of the agenda.

Connecting local councils to statewide policy information, issues and actions

Connecting local councils to state level policy work was identified as an important function of a statewide network in conversations and in evaluation following the July 30, 2014, meeting. For example, in both the phone interviews and in-person at the July 30, 2014, meeting, council leaders identified the recent Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPs) policy work as an issue impacting the entire state at the local level.

Participants indicated significant confusion existed around GAAMPs and education and information sharing was needed at the local level with both public officials and community members at-large. A statewide food council network could help provide guidance on topics such as GAAMPs.

A member of the Ottawa County Food Policy Council suggested the statewide local food council network look at Tobacco-Free Michigan as an example of conducting statewide policy work and disseminating information to the local level for action. The Tobacco-Free Michigan campaign provided local leaders with talking points that could be used in a call to action, sample press releases and policy action alerts, and updates about important new legislation. These materials all had a common message that could be adapted by local leaders in their community.

The newly formed inter-agency subcommittee on food policy can also serve as a resource for connecting local councils to state level policy issues. The Food Policy Subcommittee, which is housed within the Interdepartmental Collaboration Committee (ICC) and chaired and staffed by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, was formed to carry on the work of the MFPC.

The intention of the group is to focus on implementing policies, such as those recommended through the former MFPC and the Michigan Good Food Charter, and improving state agency and stakeholder food policy coordination. Establishing a relationship between the Food Policy Subcommittee and the local food council network would allow network members to stay up-to-date on state agency food policy decisions

as well as create a venue for local food councils to bring areas of interest or concern before state agencies.

Helping local councils build capacity

As the local food landscape continues growing and evolving across the state, demands on limited resources at the local level increase. Regardless of how a council was formed, nearly every council interviewed expressed concerns about capacity building. Of those councils surveyed, the majority are volunteer-based, meaning that the council itself does not pay its board members or leaders. Only four councils surveyed have paid council staff support. For some councils, the lack of paid staff is a barrier to moving forward, while for others it is not an issue. One council member reported that they thought they needed to have paid staff, but once they did, they realized that they were now responsible for managing that staff person and this presented a new challenge for the organization.

Broadly speaking, local councils have formed in one of two ways. Councils are made up of members who are employed in professions related to the work of the council or else they are volunteer community members who are interested in the local food system. Of the two types of councils, those which include council leaders whose professional work directly relates to the council activities struggle the most with engaging the community. Those councils formed from community members with an interest in the local food system struggle the most with moving their work forward, largely due to time constraints.

Kibibi Blount-Dorn of the Detroit Food Policy Council shared that one way the council is working to build capacity is by engaging outgoing board members in one of the four policy workgroups. By encouraging board members to remain engaged in council work, they retain institutional knowledge and are able to keep moving forward when there is a change in leadership.

Sharon Sheldon of the Washtenaw Food Policy Council shared their method for capacity building. The council has created four policy action teams (PAT) to

manage the day-to-day policy work. The PAT's are open to the public, and the council reaches out to both PAT members and members of the community when there is a vacancy to fill on the council board. This approach provides continuity between the PAT's and the council itself and creates a place for community members to become engaged in council work before serving in a leadership role.

Local council leaders expressed time and time again their struggle with engaging and retaining council/community members, challenges in organizing, and difficulty finding a place within the local food landscape. A statewide network can help connect those in similar situations to learn from one another what worked, where there were challenges, and why.

Kaitlin Koch of the Macomb Food Collaborative suggested one way to build capacity within local councils would be through establishing a needs-based mentoring program between councils. For example, the Macomb Food Collaborative has just started their organizing process and it would be helpful for them to be paired with a food council that has already gone through the process and can share their experience. Conversely, several members of the Macomb Food Collaborative successfully developed a local food purchasing policy in 2013 that was adopted by county administrators. The Macomb council could share their experience with a council looking to do something similar. This type of mentoring relationship could strengthen councils by deepening relationships and eliminating unnecessary redundancy in local food work across the state.

Many local food council leaders are involved in other aspects of the local food system and corresponding networks, including the Michigan Farm to Institution Network, the Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network and Healthy Kids Healthy Michigan. More than one council leader expressed frustration at being stretched too thin as the sheer volume of work and number of meetings in any given month can be overwhelming. This cross-network involvement speaks to a need for having greater coordination across networks. One role a local food

council network could play is helping to connect council members to statewide efforts in such ways that it would no longer be necessary for individual council leaders to have to participate in all food system-related networks.

Another way capacity building can be supported by a statewide network is through regular network meetings. By structuring the meetings in such a way that council members other than only local council leaders are allowed to participate, the statewide network is reaching and engaging more members of the local councils. This spreads out the burden of participating in a local food council network and creates an opportunity for greater council engagement.

Providing hands-on training to local food councils

Local council leaders desire hands-on training on a variety of topics that can be taken back and applied at the local level.

A statewide network can identify training materials, programs, resources and opportunities that could meet the needs of many local councils. Examples of the types of trainings needed by local councils shared during the interviews include:

- understanding the place or role a local food council fills in the community
- overcoming funding limitations
- assisting with grant writing, including how to approach and ask a funder for help
- developing a collaboration, including organizing and engaging community members
- sustaining a council by keeping people engaged
- supporting council members with no experience in food system work
- engaging youth and understanding their needs

- starting a conversation about racial equity and what it means for a community
- conducting policy work and understanding what policy work is

Suzanne Cupal, of Genesee Food for Change, suggested that the statewide local food council network utilize the resources provided by the University of Michigan Urban Research Center in Detroit for policy training. Cupal and several others in Genesee County have participated in the Communities Working in Partnership training, a program which guides local leaders through the policy process, including understanding what policy is and developing a policy platform. The training is structured in a train-the-trainer fashion and could be taken back and utilized by each council at the local level. Those participating in the training receive materials that can be duplicated and used in local training and policy efforts. The statewide network coordinator could be responsible for organizing the policy training and working with the Urban Research Center staff and those in Genesee County who have been trained in the subject matter. CRFS also has a contract with Jean Doss who works as a policy educator and has the experience and ability to conduct trainings on food policy. This connection could also be a resource for the network.

Connecting local policy information, issues and actions to other parts of the state

Council leaders recognize that the topics their council may be working on are not necessarily unique and there may be others in the state who have experience working on a similar policy or program, but the challenge is figuring out how to connect with one another.

A statewide local food council network can foster the development of peer-to-peer learning and sharing through network meetings. For example, the Detroit Food Policy Council, Washtenaw Food Policy Council and Mid-Michigan Food Systems Workgroup have all been involved in one form or another in urban farming and related zoning issues at the local level. These individual efforts could have been strengthened and

duplication of work reduced by working together. A member of the Detroit Food Policy Council stated in the July 30, 2014, meeting that individual council voices are strengthened by working together. It adds legitimacy to work and ideas being proposed at the local level when there's a statewide network supporting it.

Connecting local councils to national policy information, issues and actions

Council leaders are interested in connecting to national policy information, particularly those issues with impacts at the local level. Both the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act and Farm Bill were cited as two pieces of federal policy that local councils have been involved in or have the opportunity to participate in.

Good Food Kalamazoo originally formed around adoption of the goals of the Michigan Good Food Charter. One of their first activities was to organize around the Farm Bill, with a desire to educate the community about the impacts of the legislation on the local food system. They hosted community forums which were well attended. Many attendees began asking "where do we go from here?", which encouraged the council members to develop Good Food Round Tables, a brown bag lunch discussion on local food system issues. By taking a national policy issue and relating it to the local level, Good Food Kalamazoo was able to engage the local community and start a conversation on good food policy.

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) has an on-the ground coalition in Michigan, Michigan Voices for Good Food Policy, which can help relay information on federal policy to local groups. Grassroots organizer Lindsey Scalera has experience working with local food councils and was a founding member of the Washtenaw Food Policy Council. Additionally she facilitated both the July 30 and Oct. 27, 2014, local food council network meetings. A partnership between the statewide local food policy council network and NSAC via Michigan Voices for Good Food Policy can provide local food councils with information on federal legislation, a breakdown of the potential impact of such legislation at the local level, action alerts and sample text for call to action appeals.

In order to remain effective and continue engaging local food councils, a statewide network needs to be structured in a way that is both meaningful and useful to participants. This can be achieved by responding to the issues most important to council members as outlined above and addressing any additional concerns that arise as the network forms.

➤ CONNECTION TO THE GOOD FOOD CHARTER

The Michigan Good Food Charter created in 2010 provides a vision and goals for achieving a thriving local food economy in Michigan by 2020 that is equitable and sustainable. The Charter has been read by all of the council leaders surveyed, yet less than half report using the Charter to guide their work. Many councils felt their work was meeting the spirit of the Charter, but achieving the Charter goals was not the focus of their work. Often these leaders acknowledge that they could do a better job of utilizing the Charter.

A statewide network can provide guidance to local food councils on ways that utilizing the Charter and associated resources and connecting to other groups and networks through the Charter can support their work. By focusing on policy, the statewide local food council network will further advance existing programmatic work and complement rather than duplicate the work of other networks, such as the Michigan Farm to Institution Network and the Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network. At the same time, as CRFS staff coordinators of the Charter strive to better position network groups across the state around the goals of the Charter, a network of local food councils can serve as a venue for more effectively linking local communities into this broader partner ecosystem in mutually beneficial ways.

HOW COUNCILS USE THE CHARTER

Several food councils are actively using the Michigan Good Food Charter as a guiding document in their work. The Charter has helped launch food council discussions and provided a focal point for councils striving to conduct policy work in their local community.

In 2014, the Washtenaw Food Policy Council developed a policy platform⁸ and utilized a framework mirroring the Charter. They identified 23 policy priorities based on a survey of community members, policy action teams and council members, and then identified the level at which the policy change was needed (federal/state, county, institutional) and the type of action necessary (advocacy, standards, guidelines.) This was placed into a policy agenda framework that was approved by their board in July 2014 and is now being used to guide the work of their council. Council leaders acknowledged it was difficult to narrow the policy priorities down, but by engaging the community they were able to hear what was most important and develop the policy platform based on the information they gathered.

The Ottawa County Food Policy Council keeps the Charter materials visible at the forefront of their work and will use them to help guide the development of their strategic plan in 2015. New policies have been developed as a result of their work, as previously discussed.

Good Food Battle Creek recognizes the Charter goals as the driving force of their work. During the development of their 2013 community food assessment conducted with the help of CRFS, they identified six priorities within the charter that were

⁸ Washtenaw Food Policy Council Policy Platform: <https://washtenawfoodpolicycouncil.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/policy-agenda-by-level-final-september-xlsx.pdf>

achievable for Battle Creek. Through a series of focus groups and community conversations, it was evident that food access was the focus. In fall 2013, they began hosting racial equity workshops to raise awareness of food system issues in their community. The local health department and food bank have been key partners in the racial equity workshops and work of the council.

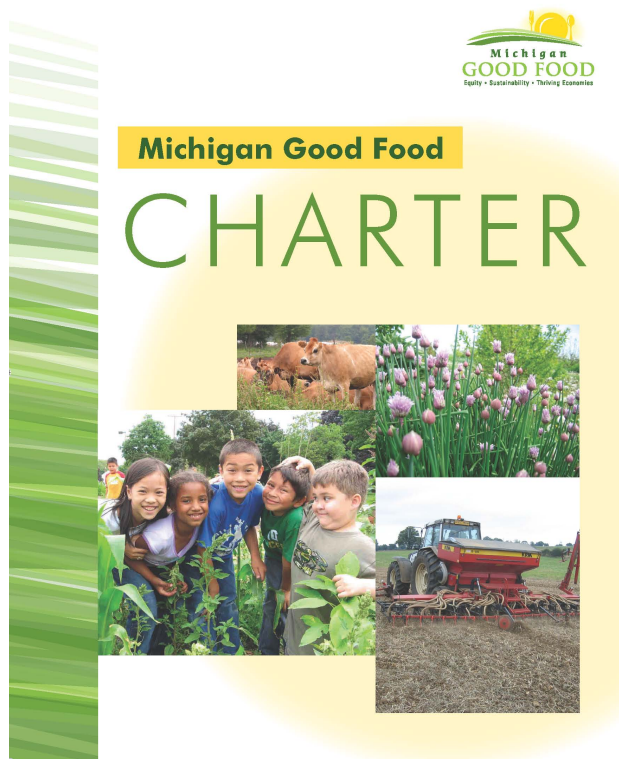
Good Food Kalamazoo was initiated in 2011 when Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes staff member Phyllis Hepp contacted local People's Food Co-op (Chris Dilley) and Kalamazoo Fair Food Matters (Paul Stermer) to discuss working together toward shared goals in Kalamazoo County. The group discussed the Michigan Good Food Charter and the emergence of food policy councils in other communities. They first started organizing around the Farm Bill with a desire to educate community members about the legislation and the impacts it has on the local food system. The group has held community round table discussions focusing on a key local food system topic that have attracted between 50 and 80 people each time. The group is introducing the Charter more broadly in the community and plans to align itself around local implementation of Charter goals.

MOVING WORK OF THE MICHIGAN GOOD FOOD CHARTER FORWARD

There is a tremendous opportunity for utilizing a statewide network of local food councils to move the work of the Michigan Good Food Charter forward. First and foremost, the Charter can be used as a way to build a unifying local food council voice for local food in Michigan. Before achieving unification, though, it is important to understand why so many councils are not directly identifying their work with the Charter.

The greatest challenge facing local councils in utilizing the Charter is the cloudiness surrounding the term policy. While the Charter's vision and goals warrant both policy and program change, if councils were more comfortable with policy work, their engagement with the Charter would likely increase. The word "policy" is perceived as something you have to fight for, and people often think of federal or state level legislative battles. Yet when policy changes occur at the local level, they have significant impacts on the local food system. Additionally, councils struggle to have a clear understanding of the type of policy work that can be done within the confines of their employer or funding restrictions.

By providing councils with examples of how the Charter has been utilized at the local level, we can begin to demonstrate the types of policy change that can occur and be led by local food councils. A statewide network can provide direction and training on policy activity that can be done by local food councils to help achieve the goals of the Charter.



► CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The interviews conducted with council members, along with the insights and feedback received from two preliminary planning meetings, reveal strong interest in and potential for developing a statewide network. Such a network can both support the evolution and work of local councils and magnify the collective efforts of councils to realize greater statewide progress in advancing the goals and vision of the Michigan Good Food Charter.

Identifying common challenges and contexts of councils and the potential functions of a statewide network provided by this report lay the foundation for forming a network. In moving from this assessment of the potential for developing a network to implementing one, the following steps need to occur:

- identify a network coordinator;
- confirm network membership with council representatives;
- determine network structure and logistics;
- set-up web platform for sharing network resources;
- clarify distinct role of the network and how it provides synergy with other existing networks; and
- determine first-year priorities for capacity building and networking topics.

Forming the statewide local food council network will support the goals and vision of the Michigan Good Food Charter. The Charter can be used as a way to build a unifying voice for the local food policy council network across the state. The statewide network can provide guidance to local food councils on ways to include the goals of the Charter in their policy work. Furthermore, the network can encourage sharing among network participants to demonstrate ways that the Charter goals are being met through policy change in local communities. By creating a peer-to-peer learning environment as the foundation for the network, local councils will become invested and engaged in the statewide local food policy council network.

The Center for Regional Food Systems is committed to continuing to support forming a network of local food councils and building on the opportunities identified in this report. CRFS has experience in developing statewide networks, most recently forming the Michigan Farm to Institution Network and Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network and is prepared to leverage this experience and available grant resources to support other partners who can serve in an active coordinating role for this network.

➤ APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What have you accomplished in the past year?
- What policies are you currently working on? If not currently working on policy, are you interested in working on policy?
- How did your group choose these policy priorities? If not currently working on policy, what policies would you like to work on?
- Who is leading the effort on your policy priorities? If not currently working on policy, who in your organization could lead this effort?
- If not currently working on policy, what resources do you need to launch your policy work?
- Are you currently working on any of the Good Food Charter goals? If yes, which ones?
- How do the policies you are working on/have worked on align with the Good Food Charter?
- How could your policy work be replicated in another community?
- What policy barriers have you encountered?
- What resources do you have to share?
- How do you spread the word about the policy work you are doing?
- What type of data collection have you conducted? How has this information been shared?
- What could be helpful to you as you continue your work in policy?
- How would you like to connect with a statewide group?
- Knowing a statewide task force exists to work on food policy, how would you bring relevant issues to them to be addressed?

APPENDIX B: LIST OF LOCAL FOOD COUNCILS THAT PARTICIPATED IN SURVEY AND/OR MEETINGS

Detroit Food Policy Council

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Kibibi Blount-Dorn, Myra Lee, Jerry Hebron

Eaton Good Food

Participation: July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Rebecca Henne, Shelli Smith

Genesee Food for Change

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Terry McLean, Suzanne Cupal, Stephen Arellano

Good Food Battle Creek

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: J.R. Reynolds

Good Food Kalamazoo

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Phyllis Hepp

Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Cynthia Price

Local Food Alliance (Tip of the Mitt)

Participation: Interview
Participants: Scott Smith, Wendy Weiland, Jen Schaap

Macomb Food Systems Collaborative Council

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Kaitlin Koch, Maryanne McLeod, Rachel Bonelli

Mid-Michigan Food Systems Work Group

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Randy Bell, Nancy McCrohan

Ottawa County Food Council

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Lisa Uganski, Patrick Cisler, Amy Oosterink

Sault Tribe Healthy Food Access Council

Participation: Interview, July 30 meeting
Participants: Donna Norkoli, Connie Watson

U.P. Food Exchange

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Natasha Lantz, Michelle Walk

Washtenaw County Food Policy Council

Participation: Interview, July 30 and Oct. 27 meetings
Participants: Sharon Sheldon, Nicole Chardoul, Amanda Edmonds, Caitlin Joseph



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